

In the Forefront of the Battle

*An American Temperance Society
Convention Address*

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THE words of scripture with which I wish to introduce this devotional hour are found in First Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 9:

"We are labourers together with God."

When we stop to contemplate the full intent of these words, we stand almost appalled. The relationship which is here brought to view by the Apostle Paul is not that of employer and employee, but it is the relationship of a partnership—the infinite God taking poor, weak mortals into partnership with Himself in accomplishing His work upon the earth—He the senior partner, we the junior partners.

While the work which must be accomplished is large and has many phases, I would call attention this morning to one particular phase. Isaiah speaks of it in the fifty-eighth chapter, verse 6:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" Surely this is the work of the temperance forces. And it is in connection with this work to which the Lord has called us that we find the assurance of verse 11:

"The Lord shall guide thee continually."

We could hardly imagine a partnership in which there was no counseling between the partners. There must be communication. Instruction and direction must be given, and God our senior partner has arranged for this in giving us counsel, guidance, and information through the Spirit of prophecy.

It is my purpose to bring to you some of this counsel this morning. The thought of the very title of our topic has been derived from these messages—"In the Forefront of the Battle."

It was not in a great convention under the influence of eloquent speakers that Seventh-day Ad-

ventists joined the battle for temperance. When we took up arms ninety years ago, our numbers were few and the flock was scattered. We held no great conventions in those days. But the foundations laid in those early years were strong and true and they were firmly established. From their very beginnings, Adventists have been a temperance people, but during the first critical decade and a half their position was more passive than active. It was a local crisis at Battle Creek, Michigan, the old headquarters city, that called forth a move that was to make its influence felt through all our history.

Go back with me the ninety years to 1859. The place is the second meeting house erected by the Adventists in Battle Creek, a small building 28 by 44 feet. The time had come to close the Sunday evening prayer meeting but the little congregation remained as consideration was given to the attitude which the Sabbathkeeping Adventists should take toward the local city election scheduled for the next day. The election issue was temperance, but for the story let us turn to a little diary kept by a youthful mother thirty-one years of age. The only record of the meeting was this one made by Ellen G. White.

"Attended meeting in the eve. Had quite a free interesting meeting. After it was time to close the subject of voting was considered and dwelt upon. James first talked, then Bro. Andrews talked and it was thought by them best to give their influence in favor of right and against wrong. They think it right to vote in favor of temperance men being in office in our city instead of by their silence running the risk of having intemperance men put in office. Bro. Hewett tells his experience of a few days [since] and is settled that [it] is right to cast his vote. Bro. Hart talks well. Bro. Lyon opposes. No others object to voting, but Bro. Kellogg begins to feel that it is right. Pleasant feelings exist among all the Brn. O, that they may all act in the fear of God.

"Men of intemperance have been in the office today in a flattering manner expressing their approbation of the course of the Sabbath keepers not voting and expressed

hopes that they will stick to their course and like the Quakers, not cast their vote. Satan and his evil angels are busy at this time and he has workers upon the earth. May Satan be disappointed is my prayer."—*E. G. White Diary, Sunday, March 6, 1859.*

We have no record of the outcome of the election, and after all that is not so important as the fact that those who were leading out in the work of Seventh-day Adventists when confronted with the issue took an aggressive stand in the ranks of militant temperance forces.

For the next two decades there was more action than published resolutions or admonitions. Through the sixties Seventh-day Adventists acquired an understanding of the importance of observing nature's laws and the relationship of diet to health. With the revelation given to Mrs. White on June 6, 1863, temperance was seen in its broader aspects, and from time to time opportunities for practical work presented themselves. One such occasion was in connection with the local option issue for the city of Oakland, California, in the summer of 1874.

Co-operation With Temperance Forces in Oakland, California

With the women of the city in the lead the effort swept into a city-wide campaign in which prominent officials and a leading newspaper took the side of the drys. In the closing days of the campaign, in the absence of a hall of sufficient size to accommodate the crowd, our ministers who had a well-located tent in the heart of the city suspended their regular meetings and offered our facilities to the temperance forces, joining them in their great effort for right. From night to night the tent was packed in great mass meetings, and then came the fateful election day. The election was a close one. Feelings were tense until the vote was counted. The temperance forces won by a

scant two hundred fifty-three votes and closed one hundred thirty-five saloons. Our workers having united with the leading citizens in the community in their winning battle for local option, the people were now ready to come out to hear the message the "Elders" had to present.

The next four years were for us a period of great progress in the temperance work. Both James and Ellen White, leaders in founding the denomination, took an active part in counseling in co-operative efforts and in public work.

Joining Temperance Forces in Battle Creek

Speaking of their experience in the spring of 1887 in this line, Mrs. White wrote:

"We were earnestly solicited to take part in a temperance mass-meeting, a very praiseworthy effort in progress among the better portion of the citizens of Battle Creek. This movement embraced the Battle Creek Reform Club, six hundred strong, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, two hundred and sixty strong. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible were familiar words with these earnest workers. Much good had already been accomplished, and the activity of the workers, the system by which they labored, and the spirit of their meetings, promised greater good in time to come.

"It was on the occasion of the visit of Barnum's great menagerie to this city on the 28th of June, that the ladies of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union struck a telling blow for temperance and reform by organizing an immense temperance restaurant to accommodate the crowds who gathered in from the country to visit the menagerie, thus preventing them from visiting the saloons and grogeries, where they would be exposed to temptation. The mammoth tent, capable of holding five thousand people, used by the Michigan Conference for camp-meeting purposes, was tendered for the occasion. Beneath this immense canvas temple were erected fifteen or twenty tables for the accommodation of guests.

"By invitation, the Sanitarium set a large table in the center of the great pavilion, bountifully supplied with delicious fruits, grains, and vegetables. This table formed the chief attraction, and was more largely patronized than any other. Although it was more than thirty feet long, it became so crowded that it was necessary to set another about two-thirds as long, which was also thronged.

"By invitation of the Committee of Arrangements, Mayor Austin, W. H. Skinner, cashier of the First National Bank, and C. C. Peavey, I spoke in the mammoth tent, Sunday evening, July 1, upon the subject of Christian Temperance. God helped me that evening; and although I spoke ninety minutes, the crowd of fully five thousand persons listened in almost breathless silence."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 4, pp. 274-275.

This audience of 5,000 was not a group of unusual size for Mrs. White, for a year earlier she had addressed some 15,000 who crowded onto the camp ground at Groveland, Massachusetts, for the meetings held one Sunday late in August. A good general interest had been aroused by the judicious newspaper advertising in the surrounding cities and it took special trains running all through Sunday to accommodate the crowds that poured onto the camp ground. Mrs. White spoke both morning and afternoon and her theme was Temperance, her favorite subject on such occasions. In describing the meeting it is reported that:

"Every seat, and all the standing room throughout the entire enclosure was full, some, following the example of Zacchaeus, climbed trees to get a sight of the speaker. Standing at the upper part of the camp-ground, the eye swept over a living sea of humanity."—*Signs of the Times*, Sept. 14, 1876.

That the presentation was successful and left a deep impression is evidenced by the fact that following the second discourse, Mrs. White was sought out by the officers of the Haverhill Reform Club and urged to speak in the city hall on the same subject the next evening. They promised an attendance of one thousand people. Mrs. White consented to fill the appointment, and for the meeting the hall, with a seating capacity of eleven hundred, was packed.

We find the secret of the interest in Mrs. White's temperance addresses when we study the line of argument followed. Often she took up the subject from the Bible standpoint, and placed em-

phasis on home influences. Writing of one of her meetings she told of how:

"We left the beaten track of the popular lecturer, and traced the origin of the prevailing intemperance to the home, the family board, and the indulgence of appetite in the child. Stimulating food creates a desire for still stronger stimulants. The boy whose taste is thus vitiated, and who is not taught self-control is the drunkard, or tobacco slave of later years. The subject was taken up upon this wide basis; and the duty of parents was pointed out in training their children to right views of life and its responsibilities, and in laying the foundation for their upright Christian characters. The great work of **Temperance Reform**, to be thoroughly successful, must begin in the home."—*Review and Herald*, August 23, 1877.

In succeeding meetings in the west and the mid-west, Mrs. White during the next few years spoke to large audiences often running to many thousands. In these successful efforts the way was paved for a call to earnest activity on the part of the regular working force and the laymen of the denomination.

The Seventh-day Adventist Position on Temperance

Thus it can be seen that as the pace was set for temperance work it was upon a very broad platform. The use of alcoholic beverages was, of course, a part of intemperance, but only a part, for it is seen that:

"Satan is taking the world captive through the use of liquor and tobacco, tea and coffee. The god-given mind, which should be kept clear, is perverted by the use of narcotics. The brain is no longer able to distinguish correctly. The enemy has control. Man has sold his reason for that which makes him mad. He has no sense of what is right."—*Evangelism*, p. 529.

And the teetotal position was taken by us from the start. We are reminded that "There is no such thing as being a moderate and temperate drinker."—*Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1878.

From early days the pledge filled an important place. With the organization of health and temperance societies a broad pledge was signed com-

mitting the signer to abstinence from tobacco and liquor, and some went further and included tea and coffee.

As a means of encouragement to those who might hesitate to sign the pledge, Mrs. White wrote in 1887:

"Let no excuse be offered when you are asked to put your name to the temperance pledge, but sign every pledge presented, and induce others to sign with you. Work for the good of your own souls, and the good of others. Never let an opportunity pass to cast your influence on the side of strict temperance."—*Counsels on Health*, p. 441.

Writing further on this point she stated that:

"From the light God has given me, every member among us should sign the pledge and be connected with the Temperance Association."—*Review and Herald*, October 21, 1884.

Called to Action

It was in an issue of our church paper, the *Review and Herald* of November 8, 1881, that Mrs. White summoned the church to militant action. Here is the appeal:

"We may call upon the friends of the temperance cause to rally to the conflict, and seek to press back the tide of evil that is demoralizing the world; but of what avail are all our efforts while the liquor-selling is sustained by law? Must the curse of intemperance forever rest like a blight upon our land? Must it every year sweep like a devouring fire over thousands of happy homes?

"We talk of the results, tremble at the results, and wonder what we can do with the terrible results, while too often we tolerate and even sanction the cause. The advocates of temperance fail to do their whole duty unless they exert their influence by precept and example—by voice and pen and vote—in favor of prohibition and total abstinence. We need not expect that God will work a miracle to bring about this reform, and thus remove the necessity for our exertion. We ourselves must grapple with this giant foe, our motto, No compromise and no cessation of our efforts till the victory is gained."—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 387, 388.

Continuing in the same aggressive vein, she asks and answers a vital question:

"What can be done to press back the inflowing tide of evil? Let laws be enacted and rigidly enforced prohibiting the sale and the use of ardent spirits as a beverage. Let every effort be made to encourage the inebriate's return to temperance and virtue. But even more than this is needed to banish the curse of inebriety from our land. Let the appetite for intoxicating liquors be removed, and their use and sale is at an end. This work must to a great degree devolve upon parents. Let them, by observing strict temperance themselves, give the right stamp of character to their children, and then educate and train these children, in the fear of God, to habits of self-denial and self-control. Youth who have been thus trained will have moral stamina to resist temptation, and to control appetite and passion. They will stand unmoved by the folly and dissipation that are corrupting society.

"The prosperity of a nation is dependent upon the virtue and intelligence of its citizens. To secure these blessings, habits of strict temperance are indispensable."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 388.

Thus was set before us our responsibility in an intemperate world.

Co-operating With Other Temperance Organizations

From early days we as a people labored in co-operation with other temperance forces. In a retrospective statement Mrs. White referred to this experience in co-operative efforts with other temperance organizations. Speaking first of her husband and then of their united labors, she wrote:

"In his labors, my husband, whenever he had opportunity, invited the workers in the temperance cause to his meetings, and gave them an opportunity to speak. And when invitations were given us to attend their gatherings, we always responded."—*E. G. White Letter* 274, 1907.

And we were admonished:

"Whenever you can get an opportunity to unite with the temperance people, do so."—*Review and Herald*, Feb. 14, 1888.

A few years later we were reminded that:

"In other churches there are Christians who are standing in defense of the principles of temperance. We should seek to come near to these workers, and make a way for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. We

should call upon great and good men to second our efforts to save that which is lost."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, pp. 110, 111.

Laying the Foundations for a Successful Effort

Not infrequently the results from mass movements carried by a wave of excitement were not lasting and the good accomplished was largely of a temporary character. Ellen White wrote of this in the very period when she was often appearing on the public platform in behalf of temperance:

"We have seen that the victories gained by the 'Temperance Crusade' are not often permanent. In those places where the excitement ran highest and apparently the most was accomplished in closing liquor saloons and reclaiming inebriates, after the lapse of a few months, intemperance prevailed to a greater extent than before the effort to suppress it was made.

"The reason of this is evident. The work is not deep and thorough. The axe is not laid at the root of the tree. The roots of intemperance lie deeper than mere liquor drinking. In order to make the temperance movement a success, the work of reform must begin at our tables."—*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 6, 1876.

Ellen White saw no hope of a strong lasting temperance work unless it was founded upon this broader platform. It was in this that Seventh-day Adventists were in a unique position to take the lead, for such a temperance work was in full keeping with the teachings and practices of the church. It is not strange then, that in presenting the great basic principles of health and right living in her book *Ministry of Healing*, she should declare that:

"In relation to tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcoholic drinks, the only safe course is to touch not, taste not, handle not." p. 335.

With this definite moral approach to the entire problem of intemperance in its broad aspects it is seen that truly lasting results are founded on religious conviction. A few excerpts are to the point:

"Everything that conflicts with natural law creates a diseased condition of the soul."—*Review and Herald*, Jan. 25, 1881.

"It is as truly a sin to violate the laws of our being as it is to break the ten commandments. To do either is to break God's laws."—*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 17.

"It is impossible for those who indulge the appetite to attain to Christian perfection."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 400.

With this viewpoint, it is easy to understand the full significance of two terse declarations:

"When temperance is presented as a part of the gospel, many will see their need of reform. They will see the evil of intoxicating liquors, and that total abstinence is the only platform on which God's people can conscientiously stand."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 7, p. 75.

"Every duty that calls for reform, involves repentance, faith and obedience. It means the uplifting of the soul to a new and nobler life. Thus every true reform has its place in the work of the third angel's message."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 110.

Multiplying the Results

But it is not alone a distinctive philosophy of the temperance work that has been given to Seventh-day Adventists. We have also been admonished as to the methods which will accomplish the most of the efforts put forth. While, of course, it is dramatic to rescue the drunk from the gutter and help him along the way, or to alter the course of those who have already put their feet in the wrong way, we are called to a more fruitful although less spectacular field. Note these thought provoking words:

"If half the efforts that are put forth to stay this giant evil were directed toward enlightening parents as to their responsibility in forming the habits and characters of their children, a thousandfold more good might result than from the present course of combating only the full-grown evil. The unnatural appetite for spirituous liquors is created at home, in many cases at the very tables of those who are most zealous to lead out in the temperance campaigns. We bid all workers in the good cause, Godspeed; but we invite them to look deeper into the causes of the evil they war against, and labor more thoroughly and

consistently in the work of reform."—*Signs of the Times*, November 17, 1890.

Writing a few years earlier the same thought was expressed and we quote it here to emphasize this important point:

"There would be little necessity for temperance crusades, which amount to so little, if in the youth who form and fashion society, right principles in regard to temperance could be implanted."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 3, p. 567.

Would it not be well during this convention to address our study to these measures which will multiply by a "thousandfold" the good that may be accomplished in the efforts put forth in the cause of temperance?

Our Place in the Battle

"Of all who claim to be numbered among the friends of temperance," states Mrs. White in *Gospel Workers*, "Seventh-day Adventists should stand in the front ranks."—p. 384.

And speaking of our arousing ourselves to undertake the work, we are reminded of the diligent efforts of the seventies, for the same author writes in 1900:

"If the work of temperance were carried forward by us as it was begun thirty years ago; if at our camp-meetings we presented before the people the evils of intemperance in eating and drinking, and especially the evil of liquor-drinking; if these things were presented in connection with the evidences of Christ's soon coming, there would be a shaking among the people. If we showed a zeal in proportion to the importance of the truths we are handling, we might be instrumental in rescuing hundreds, yea thousands, from ruin."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 111.

And in this call to the front ranks we are not alone instructed as to our distinctive broad program of temperance, and informed as to the most fruitful field in which to labor, but we are led to means we should employ in doing this work—"By precept and example—by voice and pen and vote."

By Precept and Example

The full influence of the consistent life and a timely word will never be known this side of the kingdom:

"It is our practice of the principles we inculcate that gives them weight. The world needs a practical demonstration of what the grace of God can do in restoring to human beings their lost kingship, giving them mastery of themselves. There is nothing that the world needs so much as a knowledge of the gospel's saving power revealed in Christlike lives."—*Ministry of Healing*, pp. 132, 133.

"We must educate, educate, educate, pleasantly and intelligently. We must preach the truth, pray the truth, and live the truth, bringing it, with its gracious, health-giving influences within the reach of those who know it not."—*Medical Ministry*, p. 262.

By Voice

While the passive influence of the consistent life bears its influence, we are by no means to stop here. Battles are not won without an assault upon the enemy, and our first weapon is the voice, perhaps the impassioned words of the evangelist from the public platform, or mayhap the quiet earnest counsel of the pastor or the physician, or possibly the stirring heartfelt words of youth in their zeal to stay the flood of intemperance. We are admonished that:

"The subject of Christian Temperance should find a place in our sermons in every city where we labor."—*Gospel Temperance Work*, p. 12.

"The great subject of reform is to be agitated, and the public mind is to be stirred. Temperance in all things is to be connected with the message."—*Counsels on Health*, p. 73.

By Pen

The press is a power which influences the public mind as no other means can. There are great opportunities before us in getting our temperance message before the public through the printed page.

Quoting again from *Gospel Workers* we read:

"We have a work to do along temperance lines besides that of speaking in public. We must present our principles in pamphlets and in our papers."—p. 385.

"The temperance question is to receive decided support from God's people. Intemperance is striving for the mastery; self-indulgence is increasing, and the publications treating on health reform are greatly needed. Literature bearing on this point is the helping hand of the gospel, leading souls to search the Bible for a better understanding of the truth. The note of warning against the great evil of intemperance should be sounded."—*Review and Herald*, June 23, 1903.

By Vote

"Let the voice of the nation demand of its lawmakers that a stop be put to this infamous traffic," are the words with which the *Ministry of Healing* chapter on "Liquor Traffic and Prohibition" closes. (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 346) Here is a call to the influence of the ballot box. Years earlier we were reminded of the responsibility of each citizen:

"Many deplore the wrongs which they know exist, but consider themselves free from all responsibility in the matter. This cannot be. Every individual exerts an influence in society. In our favored land, every vote has some voice in determining what laws shall control the nation. Should not that influence and that vote be cast on the side of temperance and virtue?"—*Review and Herald*, Nov. 8, 1881.

No one is excused then from the solemn responsibility to utilize the influence of his vote on the side of temperance. This was the conclusion reached at the Sunday night prayer meeting ninety years ago, and this is the counsel that has come to us through the years.

Back in the year 1881 at the Des Moines, Iowa, camp meeting, a resolution was placed before the delegates which read:

"*Resolved*, that we express our deep interest in the temperance movement now going forward in this state; and that we instruct all our ministers to use their influence among our churches and with the people at large

to induce them to put forth every consistent effort, by personal labor, and at the ballot box, in favor of the prohibitory amendment of the Constitution, which the friends of temperance are seeking to secure."—*Review and Herald*, July 5, 1881.

But some conscientious souls objected to the clause which called for action at "the ballot box" and urged its deletion. Mrs. White, who was attending this camp meeting, had retired, but she was summoned to give her counsel.

Writing of it at the time she says: "I dressed and found I was to speak to the point of whether our people should vote for prohibition. I told them 'yes,' and spoke twenty minutes.—*E. G. White Letter*, June 16, 1881.

A Revival of Temperance Work

Writing to the church in 1908, near the close of her long ministry, Mrs. White made an earnest appeal:

"Shall there not be among us as a people a revival of the temperance work? Why are we not putting forth much more decided efforts to oppose the liquor traffic, which is ruining the souls of men, and is causing violence and crime of every description? With the great light that God has intrusted to us, we should be in the forefront of every true reform."—*Counsels on Health*, p. 432.

On another occasion Mrs. White appealed:

"While intemperance has its open, avowed supporters, shall not we who claim to honor temperance come to the front and show ourselves firm on the side of temperance, striving for a crown of immortal life, and not giving the least influence to this terrible evil, intemperance?"—*Review and Herald*, April 19, 1887.

"We should be at the head in the temperance reform."—*Review and Herald*, October 21, 1884.

And to the youth of the Advent movement comes the challenge to a "holy war:"

"Will young men now humble their hearts before God, and give themselves to His service? . . . The use of intoxicating drink, which dethrones reason, and tobacco, which clouds the brain and poisons the life current, is increasing. Are our young men prepared to lift their voices in the cause of temperance and show its bearing

upon Christianity? Will they engage in the holy war against appetite and lust?"—*Gospel Temperance Work*, p. 9.

Will we take our place in the forefront of the Battle?

1. In the forefront in the total abstinence position?

2. In the forefront in our conception of the broad temperance program reaching back to the tables in our homes?

3. In the forefront in implanting the principles of temperance in the hearts of youth?

4. In the forefront in exposing the evils of liquor and in helping tempted souls to see God's purpose in their existence and their responsibility to preserve their mental, physical and spiritual faculties?

5. In the forefront in urging young and old to sign the pledge?

6. In the forefront in utilizing every opportunity of uniting with other temperance forces?

7. In the forefront in creating and utilizing every opportunity offered by the ballot box?

8. In the forefront in allowing the Saviour to demonstrate through us His sympathy and love for tempted and fallen humanity?

In thus taking our stand we are truly laborers together with God. We close with one more brief exhortation from the pen of Ellen G. White:

"Years ago we regarded the spread of temperance principles one of our most important duties. It should be so today."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 384.

Tis is our day of opportunity. Shall we take our heaven-assigned place in the forefront of the Battle in this "holy war" to which God has called us?

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